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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 001851

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BG](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: BDG INTEL BRIEFING ON ISLAMIST MILITANTS

REF: DHAKA 0815

Classified By: P/E Counselor D.C. McCullough, reason para 1.4 b, d.

11. (C/NF) On April 18, a three-man team headed by Brigadier Asif Chowdhury, Foreign Intelligence Bureau director of the military Director General Forces Intelligence (DGFI), presented a 30-minute Power Point briefing at the Embassy to Ambassador, P/E counselor, DATT, and RAO on the investigation of detained Islamist militant leader Assadullah al-Ghalib, director of the Arab Department at Rajshahi University, and two banned Islamist organizations (reftel). A 20-minute q-and-a session followed.

12. (C/NF) The DGFI officers made the following points:

A) The Targets: Ghalib leads one of three factions, each with its own youth group, professing adherence to the Islamic orthodox Ahle Hadith sect. His Ahle Hadith Andolan Bangladesh (AHAB) rejects "un-Islamic" practices like cultural events and programs aimed at empowering rural women.

AHAB spawned the two groups banned by the BDG on February 23: the Jamaaat Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB), which was created in 2002 as AHAB's secret military wing to fight anti-Islamic elements in general, and the Jagroto Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), which arose in April 2004 to counter communist/leftist influence and criminality in northwestern Bangladesh. The latter group was led operationally by Siddiqar Rahman, more infamously known as Bangla Bhai, and spiritually by Abdur Rahman. Ghalib is the supreme spiritual leader of JMB and JMJB according to detainees from both groups. The ranks of JMB and JMJB are drawn almost exclusively from the Bangladeshi Ahle Hadith community, which DGFI estimates is as small as 50,000 persons. (Note: Other estimates are as high as two million.)

B) Funding: AHAB, JMB, and JMJB receive funds from extortion, donations, periodical subscriptions, the sale of cow hides during Id festivities, and alms. A Kuwait-based NGO, the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS), provided funding via "religion attaches" at the Kuwaiti and Saudi embassies in Dhaka to about 200 imams at Ahle Hadith mosques and madrassah. (Note: According to MFA's Diplomatic List, the Saudi Embassy has a one-person "religion attache" office. There is no comparable listing for the Kuwait embassy.)

C) Ghalib's Travels: Based on Ghalib's laptop, personal records, statements, and passports (except for the last one, which he claims he lost), between 1989-1999 he traveled for conferences or other meetings to India (Bihar), Kuwait, Nepal, Bahrain, and Pakistan. In Kuwait, he met with a Salaaafist government minister named Jasem al-Aum, who owns a company that puts out Salaaafist publications. Despite this regular travel abroad, Ghalib's interests and focus were primarily domestic.

D) Fugitive Prizes: DGFI is very confident that Bangla Bhai and Abdur Rahman will be arrested very soon as the result of its monitoring of telephones, surveillance of key people and places, the activation of local police and paramilitary auxiliaries, and the posting of large rewards (the taka equivalent of 835 dollars for Rahman and 1670 dollars for Bangla Bhai). Rahman is "one hundred times" more important than Bangla Bhai because he inspires extremists to action while Bangla Bhai is just a media-enhanced field commander. Bangla Bhai may have fled to India.

E) Next Steps: After capturing Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai, the focus will shift to the operational commanders of JMB and JMJB, and then the arrest of JMB/JMJB activists. There is no timeframe since Rahman and Bangla Bhai have yet to be caught. Because DGFI has been monitoring these two groups for up to one year, it already has a list of activists. However, arresting them "pre-emptively" could be politically problematic since the case against their superiors has yet to be clearly established. When there is (unspecified) political pressure on the investigation, DGFI finds another way to proceed.

F) Positive Impact: Since DGFI arrested Ghalib and four top commanders on February 23, there has been a big drop in subversive activity across Bangladesh. The BDG is committed to building a strong legal case against Ghalib and the others to ensure long-term convictions. "We want him at least 14

years to let this movement die down." Current laws, dating from colonial times, focus on anti-state actions, need to be updated to recognize terrorism and ideologically-driven violence. There are three cases against Ghalib for allegedly instigating IED attacks. However, he insists to interrogators that he called only for rhetorical jihad, not actual violence, and this distinction is enough to hamper prosecution without additional evidence.

G) Releases: "Some" detainees have been released because police, in response to the Home Ministry's "tough" message to crack down on extremists, arrested them simply because they were found at several madrassahs. "We stopped it the next day." (Note: DGFI claimed not to have total arrest or release numbers. Local media in late February reported about two dozen arrests; in early April, media reports conflicted on whether any of the detainees had been released.)

H) Voters: At the 2001 general election, about 60 percent of AHAB members voted for BNP and 40 percent voted for AL. Jamaat Islami got zero. (Note: Others observers believe that JI does very well with Ahle Hadith voters, a potential embarrassment for the BDG in this context since JI is part of the government.)

I) Arsenal: No weapons have been recovered, only locally-made explosive powder used for IEDs.

J) RIHS: At DGFI direction, the BDG's NGO Affairs Bureau has frozen RIHS's access to foreign funds and is investigating how prior foreign funds were spent to see if a case can be built to ban RIHS. (On April 20, local media reported that Dipu Sarwar, a journalist who wrote a series of articles on RIHS, received an anonymous phone call saying he would be killed if his articles led to a halt of the NGOs activities.)

13. (C/NF) Comment: One month ago, Mission elements received virtually the same briefing, including the predictions of Bangla Bhai's and Rahman's imminent capture. The DGFI sought to convince that the BDG is committed to pursuing this "unprecedented operation" against Ghalib and the extremists, that JMB/JMJB are relatively unsophisticated in terms of weapons and external contacts, that the DGFI is fully mindful of human rights, and that Bangladeshis are overwhelmingly moderate people.

THOMAS